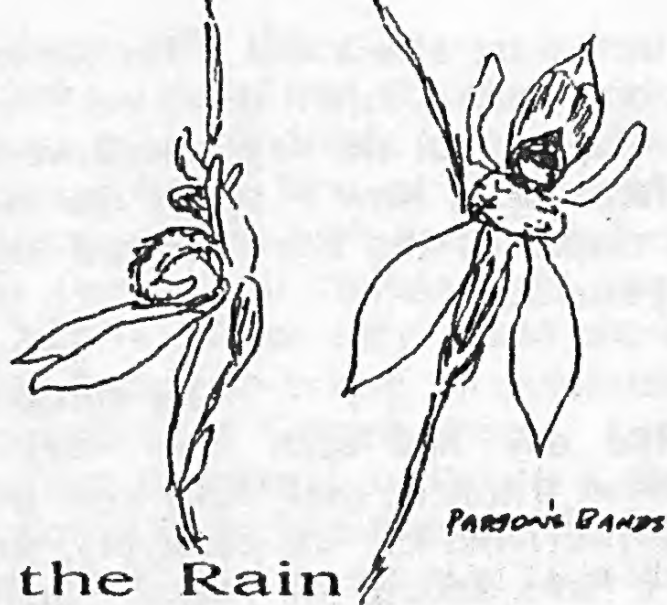


Castlemaine Naturalist May 1995

Vol. 19.4 #211



After the Rain

At Leanganook

"Our Place", Leanganook, is 100 acres situated on the South Gap of Mt Alexander, bounded by treed lane and water channel enclosure. The house garden has been developed from bare pasture over the past 9 years. It is an intensive planting of exotic and native species of trees, shrubs, vines and lower growth with the aim of a bird habitat compatible with food production and a pleasant environment for us. On the north garden boundary is our major dam. Leaks in the water channel and a seasonal creek provide nearby water for birds. I maintain a constant supply for small birds at two baths a metre or so from our main window. This year our rainfall was - Jan., 11 mm; Feb., 16; Mar., 34 (of which 32 were on 7th March). So far we have had 63 mm in April.

Moving from our windows outwards our "very common" birds are normally Blue Wrens, White-browed Scrub Wrens, House Sparrows, Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters, Crimson Rosellas, Welcome Swallows, Willie Wagtails, Red-browed Firetails, Magpies, Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, a pair of Masked Lapwings, and a daily visit from a White-faced Heron. In the house garden there are often White-plumed and White-naped Honeyeaters, and sometimes White-eared Honeyeaters, Eastern Spinebill, Eastern Yellow Robins, Grey Thrush and Restless Flycatchers. The honeyeater "visitors" usually have to put up with being chased and harrassed by the more numerous and aggressive Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters. The thrush calls demandingly until I put feed out. (I seldom feed deliberately and the wrens compete with our dogs to scavenge the crumbs from the table-cloth shaking, etc.)

The coming of the re-greening of the district is coincident with the last of the flowering of the surrounding gums. In the garden, the only plants beloved by hungry honeyeating birds, which are flowering at the moment are large banksias and some small grevillias. The top favourite foodplant of the birds, Pineapple Sage, is just bursting its first buds. My casual observations show that our birdcount is down this month,. The wrens, sparrows, robin, thrush swallows, firetails, magpies, cockatoos, lapwings

and heron are still about. The honeyeaters are noticeably absent. I've seen only one Yellow-tufted this week!!!!!!

Throughout the dry period we were able to add a number of birds to our farm list. Now it seems that more abundant water sources elsewhere have dispersed the more unusual sightings and the resident population of honeyeaters.

Margaret Hunter.

Out-throats Displaying

The day had been very cold and showery, and during the afternoon I noticed that there were more small birds in the trees around the house (we have left the eucalypts, grey box and yellow gum, in our yard) than I have noticed in weeks. Among them were two Golden Whistler males, displaying and chasing each other (the female was here the day before). I couldn't find any record, but one of the common names, Out-throat, suggests the habit is known, that the male lifts the feathers of his white throat 'til it nearly covers the black edge, throws his head back, beak pointing skyward, lifts and fans his tail and spreads his wings a bit like a clucky hen. I thought he looked comical, but the other one was going through the same routine before they started chasing, spiralling round and round each other. They repeated this two or three times as I watched, but I gave up as the rain had started again, so I don't know how long they kept it up. I thought it would be a little early for pairing up yet, but perhaps this unseasonal autumn weather has thrown their breeding clock out of gear? especially with an attractive young female around the place.

Over the days since that incident I have found that there are numerous little birds around, especially thornbills, hunting for insects in the canopy and on the remains of lawn. We've even had Yellow-rumped Thornbills in our own yard and on the lawn next door (we haven't got one of those things!), and we have never recorded them at the house before. I've seen them nearby, but not here.

Rita Mills

Boobooks and Orchids

About ten days after the first welcome rain of March 4th the Parson's Band orchids appeared at Expedition Pass. We found eleven, including a pink one, all located on or at the edge of a hard-beaten track, and even in the cleft of a small rocky outcrop.

After appearing earlier than usual at the end of March, the Southern Boobooks in the Botanic Gardens vanished again for about two weeks. Since the recent heavy rains they have re-appeared, and the presence of pellets on this occasion seems to indicate that there is more food available than in the previous dry period. The pellets consisted of tiny bones and beetle wing casings.

Shirley Parnaby

Astronomy Night at Vaughan, Monday 24 April.

"Twinkle, twinkle little star, how I wonder what you are". Tonight,

50 years after making my singing debut with this nursery rhyme, I gazed heavenward. The night was cold, dark, still and the sky was so clear. An eight inch Newtonian Reflector telescope, a handsome young man, a little dog and "two minders" make up the party. I first of all discovered that there are a myriad more stars than you can see with your naked eye, they were many colours and the closest one is four million light years away (definitely "up above the world so high"!). When they talked about others being twenty million light years away I gave up trying to understand. We traversed the night sky finding constellations Gemini, Pisces, Leo, Virgo and Scorpio. We gazed at the Southern Cross and its Pointers, the bright star Spica, the Saucepan, the Jewel Box, the Beehive Cluster, the Trapezium Stars in Orion. We found the Planet Mars, dark spots, e.g., the Coal Sack, Magenellic Clouds and even galaxies beyond our own. We completed the night by observing Jupiter rising, and for the first time I actually saw its moons and rings. Truly a night I will never forget.

Margaret Willis.

Inaugural President, Ray Bradfield, accompanied son John when he spoke at the April meeting night, which was to be held at Vaughan, but, like all astronomy nights, the weather had the last say., but John was kind enough to make a special trip from Tecoma to set up for those who wanted to see the night sky on the Monday night - and as you can see by Margaret's report, it was a perfect night. Ed.

A reminder - Surveys are being carried out on both the Swift Parrot, which breeds and spends the Summer months in Tasmania, but over-Winters in Victoria, and the Regent Honeyeater which seems to be returning to the district after many year's absence. Please forward any observations to the Secretary at the F.N.C. PO Box 324, with your name, and date, place, and number of birds seen.

Sandon Birds, March '95

White-faced Heron	Grey Fantail
Masked Lapwing	Willie Wagtail
Galah	White-browed Babbler
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Wren
Crimson Rosella	Speckled Warbler
Kookaburra	Weebill
Welcome Swallow	Brown,
Blackfaced Cuckoo-shrike	Buff-rumped,
Scarlet Robin	Yellow-rumped, and
Eastern Yellow Robin	Striated Thornbills
Golden Whistler	Southern Whiteface
Rufous Whistler	White-throated Treecreeper
Grey Shrike-thrush	Varied Sitella
Restless Flycatcher	Red Wattlebird

White-eared,
Yellow-tufted,
Fuscous,
White-plumed and
Brown-headed Honeyeaters
Striated Pardalote
Silvereye

Red-browed Firetail
White-winged Chough
Australian Magpie-lark
Magpie
Grey Currawong
Australian Raven

Susanna Starr

The Drought Year At Sandon

We have not noticed any great fluctuation in the number of small birds over the past months, but there have been variations from the norm in some birds' habits.

Some birds usually seen over Summer have been absent. There have been no cuckoos or Richard's Pipits sighted since last December and no Owlet Nightjars heard or seen since last November. No Fantailed Cuckoo was seen at all this nesting season. The Brown Falcon is usually with us throughout the year, but has not been recorded during March or April to date.

A longer absence is that of the Hooded Robin which was previously considered to be a permanent resident. It has been sighted once only (July '94) since October '93. Another permanent resident, the Yellow-faced Honeyeater, hasn't been since last November.

However, this year the Golden Whistler appeared a month early (in February) and the White-eared Honeyeater has for the first time stayed with us over the summer.

Susanna Starr.

Birds at 61 Hunter Street, April '95

A young Grey Shrike-thrush visited the garden for a day to forage underneath and in the shrubbery.

The bountiful crop of figs has attracted a variety of birds from Silvereyes and Red Wattlebirds, to a juvenile currawong - the latter constantly harassed by a pair of Magpies. New Holland Honeyeaters are now "Boss of the Banksia" (*marginata*) which is covered with blooms, and other honeyeaters are driven away. Before the rain came thornbills, sparrows and Silvereyes shared the bird bath in mixed groups, sometimes up to eight at a time, while others perched nearby to await their turn. Crimson and Eastern Rosellas come and go, feeding on hawthorn berries, and the pepper-tree blossom.

Shirley Parnaby

Maria Island

If you are blown out of the Tasmanian high country by rain, sleet and snow; whereupon bushwalking loses its charm, it only takes two hours to drop down to the East Coast at Orford and take the boat to Maria Island in

sunshine and tranquility. It wasn't always like this for guests of His/Her Majesty during the early part of last Century when it was a forbidding Penitentiary. The convict history is what most people go to see; the buildings and ruins of two separate convict periods (1825-1832 and 1842-1850). William Smith O'Brien, the Irish political prisoner, was incarcerated here as were Maori warriors from a New Zealand rebellion, but the natural history holds greater interest for us.

The walks are gentle and full of interest. Fossil cliffs towering hundreds of feet up from the sea are made up of limestone studded with millions of mussel shells (*Eurydesma* species) deposited over 200 million years ago. Cape Barren Geese graze the grassy slopes muttering as you draw near, endangered on Maria Island and thought to be the second rarest goose in the world (or beyond, to parody the words a friend of mine might use!) White-bellied Sea-eagles and the scarce Peregrine Falcon ride the updraughts along the cliff-top on occasions. The dolerite columns of the tall peaks named Bishop and Clerk at 630 metres are high enough to condense the warm rising sea air to produce localised rain which in turn supports rainforest plant species on their slopes. Once widespread in Tasmania the Forester Kangaroos are readily visible and safe from shooters in this one of their few remaining sanctuaries. Bennetts Wallabies and smaller Pademelons, also introduced, thrive here, crashing through the understory as you approach.

The main drawcard for many of us remains the rare and endangered Forty-spotted Pardalote, endemic to Maria Island and a few other Tasmanian places. Easier heard, making its two-note 'chee-chee' call, than seen it favours the white/manna gums (*Euc. viminalis*), noticeable for a rough barked stocking at their base with a smooth white and grey streaked surface to the trunk, bark ribbons hanging from the limbs, and long slender leaves.

Now for a list of some of the main plants and birds; Silver and Black Wattles are common but are difficult to tell apart without a fieldbook, Canary Broom is an invasive weed requiring a lot of work from Rangers, as it crowds out native plants.

Also identifiable: *Banksia marginata*, *Callitris rhomboidia* (Oyster Bay pine), *Drimys lanceolata* (Native pepper), *Cythodes parvifolia* (Pink Mountain Berry), Tasmanian Blue Gum, Messmate Stringybark, Celery-top Pine and Sassafras. Apart from the Cape Barren Goose and the Forty-spotted Pardalote other endemic and uncommon birds seen include; Pied and Sooty Oyster-catchers, Tasmanian Native Hen, Green Rosella, Swift Parrot, Satin Flycatcher, Pink and Dusky Robins, Tasmanian Thornbill, Strong-billed, Black-headed and Crescent Honeyeaters, Black Currawong and Forest Raven.

Chris Morris

Powerful Owls

The Powerful Owl has been in the news lately in regard to the alleged threat of habitat destruction in the nearby Wombat Forest area. Here is an extract from the newsletter of the Hunter Valley (N.S.W.) Bird Observers' Club. The area referred to - the Blackbutt Reserve - is located in the heart of heavily populated Lambton (Newcastle) and is approximately 1 km square. It is a magnificent stand of the original bush area, preserved and restored.

"We have seen two Powerful Owls perched fairly low in an *Allocasuarina torulosa* (Forest sheoak). I looked up and there was a dead Dusky Moorhen clutched in the talons of one owl. The sight was remarkable in that the long spindly legs of the moorhen hung off the branch, making the scene quite grotesque. We had previously seen one of the pair eating a Ringtail Possum. Dusky Moorhens, of course, are very common on the nearby ponds.

"Last month we watched a juvenile Powerful Owl with the parents. The adults regarded us with hooded eyes, keeping all below under surveillance by an almost imperceptible swivel of the neck. The 'teenager' was intrigued - almost falling off the branch to obtain a better view of these strange creatures on the ground. I noticed that the youngster's talons looked proportionately big for its size - they seemed as big as those of the parent birds."

Obviously Powerful Owls are opportunists where food is concerned, and can survive and even breed in urban areas given the right conditions, of which nesting hollows and plenty of food are paramount. However, such a small territory cannot support more than one pair, which means that any offspring face a dubious future.

Shirley Parnaby

Observations for April

- * Scrub-wren seen in the Melbourne Botanic Gardens on 19/3. S.S.
- * A flock of 200+ Pink-eared Ducks on Lake Linlithgow near Hamilton at the beginning of the school holidays. E.P.
- * An unprecedented number of European Wasps have gathered around the grape vines where birds have damaged the fruit. Unfortunately we have not been able to locate their nest. S.P.
- * Kangaroos are more prolific at Sandon. S.S.
- * Eight Yellow Robins were seen at Glenluce on the U3A/FNC April outing.
- * Scarlet Robin and Grey Shrike Thrush at Little Bendigo. C.M.
- * Grey and Pied Currawongs were reported from various parts of Town.
- * Yellow Thornbills seen near the south end of Farnsworth Street. S.B.
- * Bronzewing Pigeons are being seen more frequently.
- * Termites were flying, coming from trees at dusk at Cairn Curran between Picnic Point and Joyces Creek. F. B.
- * The Mynahs have disappeared from Wheeler Street, but there are now

hoards of European wasps. Also seen, a Crested Shrike-tit. G.B.

* A dead Boobook Owl was seen in the gardens at the beginning of April near the car park, and another one at the southern end of Farnsworth Street about the same time. P. & S., S.B.

* The excess sloughing of bark from eucalypts was noted by John Bradfield.

* Young trees on Mt Alexander have lost leaves but the bark is still alive so there is some hope of recovery. I.P.

* A platypus was seen having a lovely time near the ford in Merrifield Street .G.B.

* A Grey Fantail, a first for the garden, and Varied Sitellas were seen in her Harcourt garden by B.E.

* Several thousand Bone Seed plants were seen in a valley near Castlemaine. S.B.

* A young Barn Owl was seen in Rosalind Park in Bendigo, also a large mob of Kangaroos at Big Hill. B.E.

Some Field Days

Here are some of the Field Days proposed by the Land For Wildlife and Victorian Conservation Trust. Venues and times are yet to be decided, but if you are interested towards the time of the event both Susanna Starr and Chris Morris will have the information.

Sunday June 18	Farm Dams for Wildlife. * What is a good wildlife dam? *How to propagate wetland plants. *How can I improve my existing dam? * Stocking with native fish.
Thursday July 27 (evening)	Plant Propagation and Seed Collection. *How to collect native plant seed then propagation techniques *When is direct seeding more appropriate?
Sunday Aug. 20	Growing Wild Foods. *Native plants are increasingly used for food. What are the edible plants and how best to grow them.

There are five more on the list up to the end of the year which will appear in a later Castlemaine Naturalist.

CFNC BOOKLET REVISION

Some years ago the Club published a series of booklets. The Geological features, the Street Tree, the Wattle and the Eucalypt booklets are now out of print. Before this, they need to be revised. The street tree booklet in particular, needs complete revision. Suggestions and contributions are asked for. Please give these to E Perkins. E.P.

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PROGRAM

N.B. Excursions leave promptly at times stated.

General Meetings are held at Continuing Education, Templeton Street at 8pm.

Fri May 12 Aquatic Life Speaker is Peter Johnson. Cont. Ed. 8pm

Sat. May 13 Terrick Terrick. Leave 27 Doveton St at 9 am. Leader is C. Morris.

Thurs. May 18. U.3.A./CFNC birdwatching. Meet Cont. Ed. 9.30 am. Leader M. Oliver.

Fri June 9 The Campaspe River Catchment. Speaker is Ern Perkins

Sat June 10 Reservoirs on the Coliban River. Take warm clothing, binoculars, small change for entry into some reservoirs. BBQ lunch. BYO food and drinks. Leader is E. Perkins.

Fri. July 14 Some District Birds. Club members taking part are - Rufous Whistler, G. Broadway; Babblers, C. Morris; Pardalotes, M. Oliver; Galahs, R. Mills; Grey Shrike-thrush, M. Willis; Wrens, M. Hunter.

Sat. July 15 McKittericks Road. Birdwatching. Leader is C. Morris

Fri. Aug 11. Yet to be confirmed.

Sat. Sept. 23 Excursion to Castlemaine by the Botany Group of Field Naturalists Club of Victoria.

Sat Oct 14. Excursion with Maryborough F.N.C. to Muckleford and Smiths Reef. Leaving Castlemaine at 11 am. Leader E. Perkins.

Sat. Nov. 4 at 10am. Kalimna Walk with the Gardens Festival.

Committee: C. Morris (Pres.), G. Broadway (V.P.), M. Willis (Sec.), B. Envall (Treas.), K. Turner (Prog.), R. Mills (P.O. & N/L Ed.), E. Perkins, M. Oliver, S. Parnaby, B Maund, K. Meehan and S. Bruton.

Meetings:-

General - Second Friday every month (except Jan) at Continuing Education, Templeton St. at 8 pm.

Business - Held on the 4th Thursday every month (except Dec.) at 38 Campbell Street at 7.30pm. All Members are invited to attend.

Subscriptions - 1995. Ordinary Membership: Single \$14, Family \$20

Pensioner/Student: Single \$10, Family \$16. Supporting: \$25

Newsletter posted: Membership + \$6.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists' Club Inc.

P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450.

This is a bird list made from the 4.40 pm train from Spencer St to Castlemaine. The day was fine and sunny day.

Pelican	Silver Gull	Indian Mynah
Little Pied Cormorant	Crimson Rosella	Sparrow
Sacred Ibis	Indian Turtle-dove	Starling
Duck	Domestic Pigeon	Magpie
Grey Teal	Willie Wag-tail	Little Raven
Black-shouldered Kite	Red Wattlebird	Australian Raven

A total of 18 species